

The Exploits of Elaine

A Detective Novel and a Motion Picture Drama

By ARTHUR B. REEVE

The Well-Known Novelist and the Creator of the "Craig Kennedy" Stories

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SYNOPSIS.

The New York police are mystified by a series of murders and other crimes. The principal clue to the criminal is the warning letter which is sent the victims, signed with a "clutching hand." The latest victim of the mysterious assassin is Taylor Dodge, the insurance president. His daughter, Elaine, employs Craig Kennedy, the famous scientific detective, to try to unravel the mystery. What Kennedy accomplishes is told by his friend Jameson, a newspaper man. Enraged at the determined effort which Elaine and Craig Kennedy are making to put an end to his crimes, the Clutching Hand, as this strange criminal is known, resorts to all sorts of the most diabolical schemes to put their out of the way. Each chapter of the story tells of a new plot against their lives, and of the way the great detective uses all his skill to save this pretty girl and himself from death.

SEVENTH EPISODE

The Double Trap.

Mindful of the sage advice that a time of peace is best employed in preparing for war, I was busily engaged in cleaning my automatic gun one morning as Kennedy and I were seated in our living room.

Our door buzzer sounded, and Kennedy, always alert, jumped up, pushing aside a great pile of papers which had accumulated in the Dodge case. Two steps took him to the hall, where the day before he had installed a peculiar box about four by six inches, connected in some way with a lens-like box of similar size above our bell and speaking tube in the hallway below it. He opened it, disclosing an oblong plate of ground glass.

"I thought the telemicrograph arrangement was not quite enough after that spring-gun affair," he remarked. "so I have put in a sort of telescope of my own invention—so that I can see down into the vestibule downstairs. Well—just look who's here!"

"Some new-fangled periscope arrangement, I suppose?" I queried, moving slowly over toward it.

However, one look was enough to interest me. I can express it only in slang. There, framed in the little thing, was a vision of an swell "chickie" as I have ever seen.

I whistled under my breath. "Um!" I exclaimed shamelessly, "A peach! Who's your friend?"

I had never said a truer word than in my description of her, though I did not know it at the time. She was indeed known as "Gertie the Peach" in the select circle where she belonged.

Kennedy had opened the lower door and our fair visitor was coming upstairs.

"Go in there, Walter," he said, seizing me quickly and pushing me into my room. "I want you to wait there and watch her carefully."

Kennedy opened the door, disclosing a very excited young woman.

"Oh, Professor Kennedy," she cried, all in one breath, with much emotion, "I'm so glad I found you in. I can't tell you. Oh—my jewels! They have been stolen—and my husband must not know of it. Help me to recover them—please!"

"Just a moment, my dear young lady," interrupted Craig, finding at last a chance to get a word in edgewise. "Do you see that table—and all those papers? Really, I can't take your case. I am too busy, as it is, even to take the cases of many of my own clients."

"But please, Professor Kennedy—please!" she begged. "Help me. It means—oh, I can't tell you how much it means to me!"

She had come close to him and had laid her warm, little soft hand on his, in ardent entreaty.

From my hiding place in my room, I could not help seeing that she was using every charm of her sex and personality to lure him on, as she clung confidently to him.

Gertie had thrown her arms about Kennedy, as if in wildest devotion. I wondered what Elaine would have thought if she had a picture of that!

"Oh," she begged him, "please—please help me!"

Still Kennedy seemed utterly unaffected by her passionate embrace. Carefully he loosened her fingers from about his neck and removed the plump, enticing arm.

Gertie sank into a chair, weeping, while Kennedy stood before her a moment in deep abstraction.

Finally he seemed to make up his mind to something. His manner toward her changed. He took a step to her side.

"I will help you," he said, laying his hand on her shoulder. "If it is possible I will recover your jewels. Where do you live?"

"At Hazlehurst," she replied, gratefully. "Oh, Mr. Kennedy, now can I ever thank you?"

She seemed overcome with gratitude, and took his hand, pressed it, even kissed it.

"Just a minute," he added, carefully extricating his hand. "I'll be ready in just a minute."

Kennedy entered the room where I was listening.

"What's it all about, Craig?" I whispered.

For a moment he stood thinking, apparently reconsidering what he had

just done. Then his second thought seemed to approve it.

"This is a trap of the Clutching Hand, Walter," he whispered, adding tensely, "and we're going to walk right into it."

"But, Craig, I demurred, 'that's foolhardy. Have her trailed—anything—but—'

He shook his head, and with a mere motion of his hand brushed aside my objections as he went to a cabinet across the room.

From one shelf he took out a small metal box and from another a test tube, placing the test tube in his waistcoat pocket and the small box in his coat pocket with excessive care.

Then he turned and motioned to me to follow him out into the other room. I did so, stuffing my "gatt" into my pocket.

"Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Jameson," said Craig, presenting me to the pretty crook.

The introduction quickly over, we three went out to get Craig's car, which he kept at a nearby garage.

That forenoon Perry Bennett was reading up a case. In the outer office Milton Schofield, his office boy, was industriously chewing gum and admiring his feet, cocked up on the desk before him.

The door to the waiting room opened and an attractive woman of perhaps thirty, dressed in extreme mourning, entered with a boy.

Milton cast a glance of scorn at the "little dude." He was in reality about fourteen years old, but was dressed to look much younger.

"Did you wish to see Mr. Bennett?" asked the precocious Milton, politely, on one hand, while on the other he made a wry grimace.

"Yes—here is my card," replied the woman.

It was deeply bordered in black. Even Milton was startled at reading it: "Mrs. Taylor Dodge."

He looked at the woman in open-mouthed astonishment. Even he knew that Elaine's mother had been dead for years.

The woman, however, true to her name in the artistic coterie in which she was leader, had sunk into a chair and was sobbing convulsively, as only "Weepy Mary" could.

It was so effective that even Milton was visibly moved. He took the card in, excitedly, to Bennett.

"There's a woman outside—says she is Mrs. Taylor Dodge!" he cried.

If Milton had had an X-ray eye he could have seen her take a cigarette from her handbag and light it nonchalantly the moment he was gone.

As for Bennett, Milton, who was watching him closely, thought he was about to discharge him on the spot for bothering him. He took the card, and his face expressed the most extreme surprise, then anger. He thought a moment.

"Tell that woman to state her business in writing," he thundered curtly at Milton.

As the boy turned to go back to the waiting room, Weepy Mary, bearing him coming, hastily shoved the cigarette into her "son's" hand.

"Mr. Bennett says for you to write out what it is you want to see him about," reported Milton, indicating the table before which she was sitting.

Mary had automatically taken up sobbing with the release of the cigarette. She looked at the table on which were letter paper, pens and ink.

"I may write here?" she asked.

"Surely, ma'am," replied Milton, still very much overwhelmed by her sorrow.

"Weepy Mary" sat there, writing and sobbing.

In the midst of his sympathy, however, Milton sniffed. There was an unmistakable odor of tobacco smoke about the room. He looked sharply at the "son," and discovered the still smoking cigarette.

It was too much for Milton's outraged dignity. Bennett did not allow him that coveted privilege. This upstart could not usurp it.

He reached over and seized the boy by the arm, and swung him around till he faced a sign in the corner on the wall.

"See?" he demanded.

The sign read, courteously:

"No Smoking in This Office—Please."

"PERRY BENNETT."

"Leggo my arm," snarled the "son," putting the offensive cigarette defiantly into his mouth.

There was every element of a gaudy mixup, when the outer door of the office suddenly swung open and Elaine Dodge entered.

Gallantry was Milton's middle name, and he sprang forward to hold the door, and then opened Bennett's door, as he ushered in Elaine.

As she passed "Weepy Mary," who was still writing at the table and crying bitterly, Elaine hesitated and looked at her curiously. Even after Milton had opened Bennett's door, she could not resist another glance. Instinctively, Elaine seemed to scent trouble.

Bennett was still studying the black-bordered card when she greeted him.

"Who is that woman?" she asked, still wondering about the identity of the niece outside.

At first he said nothing. But finally, seeing that she had noticed it, he handed Elaine the card, reluctantly.

Elaine read it with a gasp. The look of surprise that crossed her face was terrible.

Before she could say anything, however, Milton had returned with the sheet of paper on which "Weepy Mary" had written and handed it to Bennett.

Bennett read it with uncontrolled astonishment.

"What is it?" demanded Elaine.

He handed it to her, and she read:

As the lawful wife and widow of Taylor Dodge I demand my son's rights and my own.

MRS. TAYLOR DODGE.

Elaine gasped at it.

"She—my father's wife!" she exclaimed. "What effrontery! What does she mean?"

Bennett hesitated.

"Tell me," Elaine cried. "Is there—can there be anything in it? No—no—there isn't."

Bennett spoke in a low tone. "I have heard a whisper of some scandal or other connected with your father—but—"

Elaine was first shocked, then indignant.

"Why—such a thing is absurd. Show the woman in!"

"No—please—Miss Dodge. Let me deal with her."

By this time Elaine was furious.

"Yes—I will see her."

She pressed the button on Bennett's desk, and Milton responded.

"Milton, show the woman in," she ordered, "and that boy, too."

As Milton turned to crook his finger at "Weepy Mary," she nodded surreptitiously and dug her fingers sharply into "son's" ribs.

"Yell—your little fool—yell," she whispered.

Obedient to his "mother's" commands, and much to Milton's disgust, the boy started to cry in close imitation of his elder.

Elaine was still holding the paper in her hands when they entered.

"What does all this mean?" she demanded.

"Weepy Mary," between sobs, managed to blurt out, "You are Miss Elaine Dodge, aren't you? Well, it

"son," had arrived at the little tumble-down station and had taken the only vehicle in sight, a very ancient carriage.

It ambled along until, at last, it pulled up before the vestry room door of the church, just as the bogus minister was finishing his transformation from a frank crook. Clutching Hand was giving him his final instructions.

Elaine and the others alighted and approached the church, while the ancient vehicle rattled away.

"They're coming!" whispered the crook, peering cautiously out of the window.

Clutching Hand moved silently and snake-like into the closet and shut the door.

"How do you do, Doctor Cartson?" greeted "Weepy Mary." "I guess you don't remember me."

The clerical gentleman looked at her fixedly a moment.

"Remember you?" he repeated. "Of course, my dear, I remember everyone I marry."

"And you remember to whom you married me?"

"Perfectly. To an older man—a Taylor Dodge."

Elaine was overcome.

"Won't you step in?" he said suavely. "Your friend here doesn't seem well."

They all entered.

"And you—you say you married this—this woman to Taylor Dodge?" queried Elaine, tensely.

The bogus minister seemed to be very fatherly. "Yes," he asserted, "I certainly did so."

"Have you the record?" asked Elaine, fighting to the last.

"Why, yes. I can show you the record."

He moved over to the closet. "Come over here," he asked.

He opened the door, Elaine screamed and drew back. There stood her arch enemy, the Clutching Hand himself.

As he stepped forth, she turned wildly, to run—anywhere. But strong arms seized her and forced her into a chair.

She looked at the woman and the minister. It was a plot!

"A moment Clutching Hand looked Elaine over. 'Put the others out,' he ordered the other crook.

"Now, my pretty dear," began the Clutching Hand as the lock turned in the vestry door, "we shall be joined

means that your father married me when I was only seventeen and this boy is our son—your half-brother."

"No—never," cried Elaine vehemently, unable to restrain her disgust.

"Weepy Mary" smiled cynically. "Come with me and I will show you the church records and the minister who married us."

"You will?" repeated Elaine defiantly. "Well, I'll just do as you ask. Mr. Bennett shall go with me."

"No, no, Miss Dodge—don't go. Leave the matter to me," urged Bennett. "I will take care of her. Besides, I must be in court in twenty minutes."

Elaine paused, but she was thoroughly aroused.

"Then I will go with her myself," she cried defiantly.

In spite of every objection that Bennett made, "Weepy Mary," her son and Elaine went out to call a taxicab to take them to the railroad station where they could catch a train to the little town where the woman asserted she had been married.

Meanwhile, before a little country church in the town, a closed automobile had drawn up.

As the door opened a figure, humped up and masked, alighted.

It was the Clutching Hand.

The car had scarcely pulled away when he gave a long rap, followed by two short taps, at the door of the vestry, a secret code, evidently.

Inside the vestry room a man well dressed, but with a very sinister face, heard the knock and a second later opened the door.

"What—not ready yet?" growled the Clutching Hand. "Quick—now—get on those clothes. I heard the train whistle as I came in the car. In which closet does the minister keep them?"

The crook, without a word, went to a closet and took out a suit of clothes of ministerial cut. Then he hastily put them on, adding some side-whiskers, which he had brought with him.

At about the same time Elaine, accompanied by "Weepy Mary" and her

shortly by your friend, Craig Kennedy, and," he added with a leer, "I think your rather insistent search for a certain person will cease."

Elaine drew back in the chair, horrified at the implied threat.

Clutching Hand laughed diabolically. While these astounding events were transpiring in the little church, Kennedy and I had been tearing across the country in his big car, following the directions of our fair friend.

We stopped at last before a prosperous, attractive-looking house and entered a very prettily furnished, but small parlor. Heavy portieres hung over the doorway into the hall, over another into a back room and over the bay windows.

"Won't you sit down a moment?" coaxed Gertie. "I'm quite blown to pieces after that ride. My, how you drive!"

As she pulled aside the hall portieres, three men with guns thrust their hands out. I turned. Two others had stepped from the back room and two more from the bay window. We were surrounded. Seven guns were aimed at us with deadly precision.

"Gentlemen," he said quietly. "I suspected some such thing. I have here a small box of fulminate of mercury. If I drop it, this building and the entire vicinity will be blown to atoms. Go ahead—shoot!" he added, nonchalantly.

The seven of them drew back rather hurriedly.

Kennedy was a dangerous prisoner. He calmly sat down in an arm chair, leaning back as he carefully balanced the deadly little box of fulminate of mercury on his knee.

Gertie ran from the room.

For a moment they looked at each other, undecided. Then, one by one, they stepped away from Kennedy toward the door.

The leader was the last to go. He had scarcely taken a step.

"Stop!" ordered Kennedy.

The crook did so. As Craig moved

toward him, he waited, not sweet breaking out on his face.

"Say," he whined, "you let me be!"

It was ineffectual. Kennedy, smiling confidently, came closer, still holding the deadly little box, balanced between two fingers.

He took the crook's gun and dropped it into his pocket.

"Sit down!" ordered Craig.

Outside, the other six peeped in hoarse whispers. One raised a gun, but the woman and the others restrained him and fled.

"Take me to your master!" demanded Kennedy.

The crook remained silent.

"Where is he?" repeated Craig.

"Tell me!"

Brill the man remained silent.

Craig looked the fellow over again. Then, still with that confident smile, he reached into his inside pocket and drew forth the tube I had seen him place there.

"No matter how much you accuse me," added Craig casually, "no one will ever take the word of a crook that a reputable scientist like me would do what I am about to do."

He had taken out his penknife and opened it. Then he beckoned to me. "Bare his arm and hold his wrist, Walter," he said.

Craig bent down with the knife and the tube, then paused a moment and turned to tube so that we could see it.

On the label were the ominous words:

Germ Culture 6248A

Bacillus Leprae (Leprosy)

Calmly he took the knife and proceeded to make an incision in the man's arm. The crook's feelings underwent a terrific struggle.

"No—no—no—don't," he implored. "I will take you to the Clutching Hand—even if he kills me!"

Kennedy stepped back, replacing the tube in his pocket.

"Very well, go ahead!" he agreed.

We followed the crook, Craig still holding the deadly box of fulminate of mercury carefully balanced so that if anyone shot him from a hiding place it would drop.

No sooner had we gone than Gertie hurried to the nearest telephone to inform the Clutching Hand of our escape.

Elaine had sunk back into the chair as the telephone rang. Clutching Hand answered it.

A moment later, in uncontrollable fury he hurled the instrument to the floor.

"Here—we've got to act quickly—that devil has escaped again," he hissed. "We must get her away. You keep her here. I'll be back—right away—with a car."

He dashed madly from the church, pulling off his mask as he gained the street.

Kennedy had forced the crook ahead of us into the car which was waiting, and I followed, taking the wheel this time.

"Which way, now—quick!" demanded Craig. "And if you get me in wrong—I've got that tube yet—you remember."

Our crook started off with a whole burst of directions that rivaled the motor guide—"Through the town, following trolley tracks, jog right, jog left under the railroad bridge, leaving trolley tracks; at the cemetery turn left, stopping at the old stone church."

"Is this it?" asked Craig incredulously.

"Yes—as I live," swore the crook in a cowed voice.

He had gone to pieces. Kennedy jumped from the machine.

"Here, take this gun, Walter," he said to me. "Don't take your eyes off the fellow—keep him covered."

Craig walked around the church, out of sight, until he came to a small vestry window and looked in.

There was Elaine, sitting in a chair, and near her stood an elderly-looking man in clerical garb, which to Craig's trained eye was quite evidently a disguise.

Elaine happened just then to glance at the window and her eyes grew wide with astonishment at the sight of Craig.

He made a hasty motion to her to make a dash for the door. She nodded quietly.

With a glance at her guardian she suddenly made a rush.

He was at her in a moment, pouncing on her, catlike.

Kennedy had seized an iron bar that lay beside the window where some workmen had been repairing the stone pavement, and with a blow shattered the glass and the sash.

At the sound of the smashing glass the crook turned and with a mighty effort threw Elaine aside, drawing his revolver. As he raised it, Elaine sprang at him and frantically seized his wrist.

Utterly merciless the man brought the butt of the gun down with full force on Elaine's head. Only her hat and hair saved her, but she sank unconscious.

Then he turned at Craig and fired twice.

One shot grazed Craig's hat, but the other struck him in the shoulder and Kennedy recoiled.

With a desperate effort he pulled himself toward her and leaped forward again, closing with the fellow and wrenching the gun from him before he could fire again.

Just then the man broke away and made a dash for the door leading back into the church itself, with Kennedy after him.

Up he went into the choir loft and then into the belfry itself. There they came to sheer hand-to-hand struggle. Kennedy tripped on a loose board, and would have fallen backwards if he had not been able to recover himself just in time. The crook, desperate, leaped

for the ladder leading farther up into the steeple.

Kennedy followed.

Elaine had recovered consciousness almost immediately, and, hearing the commotion, stirred and started to rise and look about.

From the